

# Attitudes Towards Self-Care **in Brent**



**January 2020**

## Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
INTRODUCTION .....	4
BACKGROUND .....	4
METHODOLOGY .....	5
FINDINGS.....	6
CONCLUSIONS.....	12
RECOMMENDATIONS .....	12
APPENDIX.....	14

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Health Help Now App, which facilitates self-care in the community, was introduced to Brent residents in 2018. Brent CCG delivered a publicity and engagement programme to support the roll-out of the App.

Between June and September 2019, Healthwatch Brent conducted a review of local awareness of self-care and the use of the App.

Through a public survey and targeted focus groups, the team collected the views of 319 residents about how they manage their health and wellbeing and their awareness of the App.

- 93% told us that they had not heard of the Health Help Now App
- 47% said that they would download it after hearing about it
- Many people found it difficult to self-care due to conflicting priorities
- There was a concern amongst respondents about the increasing use of technology in healthcare and a sense of depersonalisation
- Residents did not feel confident in managing their health and wellbeing and still prefer face-to-face interaction with health professionals

Healthwatch Brent recommends the following:

1. Increased advertising of the Health Help Now App:  
Raise awareness across different areas and community groups in the borough using different advertising platforms, including the pharmacies that agreed to promote the App (available in Appendix II).
2. Provide clear and consistent information about managing health and wellbeing across different platforms.
3. Ensure that support for mental health is available, not just at crisis points, particularly for young people.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Healthwatch Brent would like to thank all who contributed to this project:

The residents of Brent who took the time to share their views.

The community groups who welcomed the team and provided their insights;  
Bheard Service Users Group, Brent Carers Centre Forum, Brent Parents Forum,  
Brent Young People Thrive and Elder's Voice.

Our colleagues at Brent CCG who provided materials for the Health Help Now App.

The team of volunteers and staff at Healthwatch Brent.

## INTRODUCTION

Healthwatch Brent is part of a national network led by Healthwatch England, which was established through the Health and Social Care Act in 2012, to give service users of health and social care services a powerful voice both locally and nationally. We are the independent voice for people's views on Brent services, both good and bad. We listen to local people and feedback patient experience and liaise with local commissioners and decision makers, in order to improve services.

**93% of Brent residents had not heard about the Health Help Now App available to them.**

In January 2018, Brent CCG launched the Health Help Now App. 18 months later, Healthwatch Brent decided to review local people's awareness of it. Healthwatch Brent engaged with local residents, using survey and focus groups, to find out what self-care means to them and if they were aware of a digital tool designed to facilitate self-care; the Health Help Now App.

## BACKGROUND

Self-care is taking action for both oneself and others' health and wellbeing, whilst understanding how to use health services<sup>1</sup>. NHS England, for some time, has encouraged people to engage in self-care. Managing one's own health can help alleviate the huge strain on primary and emergency health services. It has been proposed that if people practice self-care, then visits to GPs could decrease by 40%, outpatient visits could be reduced by 17%, A&E visits could be reduced up to 50%, and hospital admission could be halved<sup>2</sup>. The emphasis on prevention is clear in the NHS Long Term Plan. The Supported Self-Management approach is part of the 10-year plan aiming to identify the knowledge, skills and confidence people have in managing their own health and care and encourages the use of tools to facilitate this<sup>3</sup>.

### Self-Care initiatives in Brent

Reflecting national objectives, Brent's local priorities are centered around prevention. By 2021 they want communities empowered to make decisions for their

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<sup>1</sup> NHS England (2018) Encouraging people to choose self-care for life  
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2018/11/encouraging-people-to-choose-self-care-for-life/>

<sup>2</sup> NHS England (2018) Encouraging people to choose self-care for life  
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2018/11/encouraging-people-to-choose-self-care-for-life/>

<sup>3</sup> NHS England (2019) Supported Self-Management  
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/supported-self-management/>

own health and wellbeing<sup>4</sup>. Self-care is one of the key activities in the Brent Health and Care Transformation Programme. It is developing a local model of self-care within Primary Care Networks through the use of social prescribing link workers to reduce GP appointments for non-health reasons and has aligned with SIBI to reduce social isolation<sup>5</sup>.

### **The Health Help Now App**

Brent CCG launched the Health Help Now App at the Health Partners Forum in January 2018. The digital tool provides support to self-care for local people across North West London. This includes access to NHS approved medical advice and a symptom checker, helps residents find the nearest health services, access GP online: make appointments/repeat prescriptions, view their summary record, and receive support for mental health<sup>6</sup>.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Healthwatch Brent examined local people's perceptions about self-care and their awareness of the Health Help Now App using a two-fold approach. Using an initial survey, residents were asked about the Health Help Now App and self-care more generally. Information and download codes for the App were provided to respondents.

The respondents were, generally, reflective of Brent's demographics. Where there were less responses from particular age or community groups, focus groups were held to ensure that their views are represented in the report.

Various areas across Brent were visited by the team to capture the perceptions of as many residents as possible. However, the sampling methods for both the survey and focus groups allowed only for people who were available at the time of the visits to participate. This resulted in busier areas of the borough receiving more responses.

Due to the sampling methods, the report cannot offer generalisable findings. The survey was conducted with an opportunistic sampling method and the focus groups using purposive methods. Furthermore, as they survey and focus groups were conducted in English, the findings are limited. Therefore, this report offers a

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<sup>4</sup> Brent CCG (2017) Health and wellbeing 5 year plan 2017-2021

<https://www.brent.gov.uk/media/16407059/brent-health-and-care-plan.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Brent CCG (2019) Health and Care Transformation Programme Update, Health and Wellbeing Board 7 October 2019

<http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s89544/Health%20Care%20Transformation%20Board%20-%20Update.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> NHS North West London (2019) Health Help Now App

<https://www.healthiernorthwestlondon.nhs.uk/digitalhealth/apps/healthhelpnowapp>

snapshot of the views of local people who were available at the time of the survey and focus groups.

A full breakdown of the demographics and locations visited are available in Appendix II.

All data was collated and analysed by Healthwatch Brent.

### **Resident Survey**

Healthwatch Brent staff and volunteers distributed resident surveys across the borough.

The survey was distributed to local people in public spaces across Cricklewood, Harlesden, Kilburn, Kingsbury, Neasden, Park Royal, Wembley and Willesden Green in pharmacies, Central Middlesex Hospital and at community events.

### **Focus Groups**

In addition to a public survey, Healthwatch Brent led 5 focus groups with existing community groups:

- Bheard Service Users Group
- Brent Carers Centre Forum
- Brent Parents Forum
- Brent Young People Thrive
- Elder's Voice

Four other local community groups were contacted by the team to no response. The team facilitated discussion with groups around the topic of self-care. The objective was to explore what self-care meant to them and their attitudes towards the role of technology, such as the Health Help Now App, when caring for themselves and others. The participants were also encouraged to complete the public survey.

## **FINDINGS**

Between June and September 2019, the Healthwatch Brent team engaged with 319 local people across the borough:

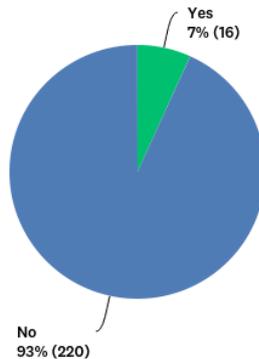
- 83 people attended the 5 focus groups
- 236 responded to the survey

The findings demonstrate a poor awareness of the Health Help Now App and mixed sentiments about self-care from Brent residents.

Increased awareness raising for the importance of self-care and forms of information, such as the App, is required in Brent.

## Awareness of Health Help Now App

Do you know about the NHS 'Health Help Now' App?



**From 236 survey respondents, only 7% (16 residents) knew about the Health Help Now App available to them in Brent.**

- 75% (12) were based in Wembley
- 31% (5) were aged 25-34 years old  
25% (4) were aged 45-54 years old  
No one under the age of 18 and over 64 reported to have heard about the App
- 25% (4) were White British  
19% (3) were Caribbean  
19% (3) listed 'other'; Albanian and Sri Lankan
- The majority of people, 38% (6), had found out about the App from their workplace; often within the NHS or an affiliated health organisation.  
25% (4) of the respondents had heard about the App from advertising or communication strategies.  
25% (4) had learned about the App from their GP practice.
- 69% of respondents who were aware of the App (11) said that they had not used it before.
- 5 respondents had used the App and gave positive feedback about their experience:

*'Loved the App, saves me time and don't have to call for an appointment'*

**The remaining 93% of respondents (216) had not heard of the App.**

- 47% (104) would like to download the App after the survey;

*‘easy to book appointments’*

*‘interested to see how it works’*

*‘time saving’*

*‘good to have access to your records and health information’*

- 53% did not want to download the App after hearing about it;

*‘I wouldn’t want to look for info if I wasn’t well. I’d want to see a professional’*

*‘I don’t have a smart phone’*

*‘I have learning disabilities, I wouldn’t understand it- I need to speak to someone when I need help’*

- Respondents suggested that there’d be more advertising for the App, particularly in GP practices, community areas, Brent’s magazines and through the council and CCG websites.
- Staff in 18 of the pharmacies visited had not heard of the App but agreed to promote the App to their service users once informed.

### **Perceptions about Self-Care**

The NHS Long Term Plan and local health and wellbeing priorities are increasingly focused on self-care in the community. The limited awareness of the Health Help Now App called for further examination into local peoples’ perceptions of self-care more generally.

### **Knowledge and Awareness of Self-Care**

People understood self-care as being responsible for their own health and wellbeing. Across the groups, knowledge of self-care was consistent, but the importance the different groups placed on self-care differed.

- All groups acknowledged the importance of exercise, eating well and living a healthy lifestyle in caring for themselves.
- Groups with older participants recognised the importance of caring for their physical wellbeing and keeping social.

*‘preventing illness and not letting illness get worse’*

*‘keeping up with social life, having a social network’*

- Groups with younger participants tended to view physical self-care as something for later in life and focused more on caring for their mental wellbeing.

*‘actively looking after yourself, specifically your mental health’*

*‘you don’t go out of your way to care for yourself, just when you’re not feeling well’*

## Barriers to Self-Care

A number of barriers to self-care were identified during the discussions:

- Conflicting priorities was a common barrier across all groups. This was particularly identified by carers and parents, admitting that they often neglect their own self-care to care for others. Time was a major factor in these discussions.

*‘I have to make sure the person I am caring for is looked after’*

*‘people caring for elders can be as old as the people they are caring for’*

*‘I would exercise but I don’t get the time to’*

Young people found managing priorities of education and taking responsibility for their wellbeing conflicting. Respondents recalled that they could not get a medical appointment without missing class.

*‘it’s hard when you’re at school, you have to miss school to get an appointment’*

*‘in A-Level, if you miss [class], you’re screwed’*

The expense of keeping well was cited by a number of participants. Some argued that eating well and exercising did not fit within their budgets.

*‘financial worries, healthy food, exercising at the gym and socialising can be expensive’*

- Young people reported difficulties accessing mental health support. They felt support was only available to them if in crisis.

*‘you have to wait 6 months for a therapist’*

*‘unless you have suicidal thoughts, they don’t do anything’*

- Fear was a theme common to most groups. The respondents suggested that they may ignore a health-related problem out of fear or they may not be aware of a problem that they would need to care for.

*‘sometimes you’re not aware that you are not well’*

*‘feeling worried about something that’s happening in your body, you might ignore it hoping it’ll go away’*

*‘being scared, if you think that something’s wrong, you might not want to hear about it’*

- Information about caring for oneself was raised as an issue across the groups. They felt the guidance and information offered is not consistent. It was suggested that NHS 111 often referred them straight to a GP when they did attempt to self-care. There was praise for the NHS Choices website, a source of information for most. However, they felt that this was too generalised and that there was no single point of information locally (prior to them knowing about the Health Help Now App).

*‘for people with learning disabilities, you need easy read. You have long words and lots of medical information we don’t understand’*

*‘there’s no one point to get information in one place’*

*‘I like the NHS website, it’s clear and easy to read’*

53% of survey respondents (114) said that they would be interested in receiving information about self-care, particularly if it was easy to access.

*‘if user friendly and able and able to have access to community and health services’*

## The Use of Technology

The NHS is rapidly digitalizing and changes to the way we use technology are developing, particularly as part of the Long Term Plan. Residents of Brent in this report, however, remain sceptical about using technology to manage their health and wellbeing.

Across the groups, attitudes about using technology as a facilitator of self-care was negative. Some benefits of using technology were acknowledged by all groups but their concerns greatly outweighed these.

- The respondents praised using technology for its convenience. They found online access to book their GP appointments useful and time efficient. NHS Choices was also quoted as being useful due to its easy access to information.

*‘having information is always useful. It can be hard to get through to my GP, hopefully this can help the GP as well as me’*

*'it will make it easier to monitor my health'*

- There was a particular focus on access to technology during the discussions and through survey feedback. Respondents were concerned about people who have limited access to, or are not literate with, smartphones or computers.

*'not into technology. I am a people's person, I need to speak to someone'*

*'I don't have that kind of phone'*

*'age is a factor, some people don't know how to use a computer'*

- Language barriers was also raised as an issue when using technology. Some survey respondents said they would not use the App as they are not confident speaking English.

*'there'd be a language barrier'*

*'my English is not good'*

- Concerns about data protection emerged in both focus group and survey responses. Respondents were concerned about the privacy and security of their personal information.

*'it is a good idea, but I'm concerned about the security of the information'*

*'I'd be worried about privacy and scams with having my details online'*

- Respondents were not confident that the information provided online, or in the App, would be interpreted correctly leading people to self-diagnose or ignore more serious problems. There was a general consensus that they would prefer to seek advice from a medical professional face to face.

*'I still think patients should see a professional for health-related issues, especially for mental health'*

*'I don't think it is right to search for information on an app, what if I read the wrong information or don't understand what it says?'*

*'it isn't going to solve the problems that are already there; the lack of GP appointments'*

## CONCLUSIONS

Healthwatch Brent aimed to examine local residents' attitudes towards self-care and their awareness of the digital tool aimed to help people better manage their health and wellbeing; the Health Help Now App. Using a survey and holding focus groups with the community, the views of 319 residents were collected.

The findings show there is a poor awareness of the App, with only 7% of the respondents reported to have heard of it. However, nearly half of the survey respondents wanted to download the App and were interesting in receiving information about self-care. Arguably, use of the App, and more generally, self-care practice, within the community can be increased through heightened advertising and raising awareness.

There was a consistent understanding of self-care across the responses, however, attitudes differed across age groups. A number of barriers to managing their own health and wellbeing emerged. A common theme was having to manage conflicting priorities.

There is a keen interest for more consistent information about self-care in the community. However, from both survey and focus group data, it was found that the respondents were less confident about their self-care and relied heavily on health professionals. Consequently, the use of technology for managing health was viewed less favourably.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Healthwatch Brent recommends the following:

1. Increase advertising of the Health Help Now App:  
Raise awareness across different areas and community groups in the borough using different advertising platforms, including the pharmacies that agreed to promote the App (available in Appendix II).
2. Provide clear and consistent information about managing health and wellbeing across different platforms.
3. Ensure that support for mental health is available, not just at crisis points, particularly for young people.

We presented this this report to CCG Primary Care for their formal response.

However, due to their priorities in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic they were unable to provide a response at this time.

## REFERENCES

Brent CCG (2017) Health and wellbeing 5 year plan 2017-2021

<https://www.brent.gov.uk/media/16407059/brent-health-and-care-plan.pdf>

Brent CCG (2019) Health and Care Transformation Programme Update, Health and Wellbeing Board 7 October 2019

<http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s89544/Health%20Care%20Transformation%20Board%20-%20Update.pdf>

NHS England (2018) Encouraging people to choose self-care for life

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/2018/11/encouraging-people-to-choose-self-care-for-life/>

NHS England (2019) Supported Self-Management

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/supported-self-management/>

NHS North West London (2019) Health Help Now App

<https://www.healthiernorthwestlondon.nhs.uk/digitalhealth/apps/healthhelpnowapp>

## APPENDIX

### Appendix I. Survey

## Health Help Now App Survey

*Healthwatch Brent are looking into people's use and awareness of the 'Health Help Now' App. All answers are confidential and will be combined with others to form a report.*

*The app gives Brent residents access to NHS approved medical advice and a symptom checker, helps you find health services closest to you, access your GP online: make appointments/repeat prescriptions and view summary record, and receive support for mental health, all on your mobile.*

**Do you know about the NHS 'Health Help Now' App available to Brent residents?**

**Yes**

a. Where did you hear about it?

b. Have you used it before?

**No**

a. Would you be interested in having access to this type of self-help information?

b. Would you like to download the app? (why/why not?)

**Please tell us about yourself:**

**Your Age:**

- |                                   |                                |                                |                                |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 18-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 25-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 35-44 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 45-54    | <input type="checkbox"/> 55-64 | <input type="checkbox"/> 64-74 | <input type="checkbox"/> 75+   |

**Your Ethnic Background:**

- |  |  |  |                                      |
|--|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> African       | <input type="checkbox"/> Arab                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian British | <input type="checkbox"/> Bangladeshi |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Caribbean     | <input type="checkbox"/> Gypsy/Irish Traveller | <input type="checkbox"/> Indian        | <input type="checkbox"/> Pakistani   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> White British | <input type="checkbox"/> Other mixed           | <input type="checkbox"/> Other white   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:      |

**Thank you for your time**

Your views will be used anonymously in a report which will be shared with Brent CCG.

You can find out more about Healthwatch Brent at [www.healthwatchbrent.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbrent.co.uk)

## Appendix II. Survey Additional Information

### Survey Demographics

#### Respondent Age Group

- 25% aged between 45 and 55 (58 people)
- 20% aged between 25 and 34 (46 people)
- 14% aged under 24 (32 people)
- 12% aged over 65
- (27 people)

#### Respondent Ethnicity

- 21% White British (49 people)
- 18% Asian/ Asian British (44 people)
- 16% African (38 people)
- 14% 'other'; Romanian, Somali, Irish and Albanian (33 people)

### Areas visited for Survey of Health Help Now App

#### Survey in public spaces

Cricklewood  
Harlesden  
Kilburn

Kingsbury  
Neasden  
Park Royal

Wembley  
Willesden Green

#### Surveys at community events

Wembley Dementia Picnic  
Brent Civic Centre  
Central Middlesex Hospital

Bheard Service Users Group  
Brent Carers Centre Forum  
Brent Parents Forum

Brent Young People Thrive  
Elder's Voice

#### Pharmacies visited

##### Cricklewood

Akhtar Pharmacy  
Maxwell Gordon  
Pharmacy  
Green Light Pharmacy

Willian 'N' Gimmack Chemist  
Castle Chemist

##### Kilburn

Hyperchem Pharmacy

Queens Park Pharmacy

##### Kingsbury

Brampton Health  
Centre  
U.N.P Pharmacy  
Jade Pharmacy

Kubri Chemist  
Boots Pharmacy

##### Neasden

Frank Wreford  
Gudkas Chemist

Clockwork Pharmacy

**Willesden Green**

Craig  
Pharmacy  
R&C Pharmacy

Thompson

Newcare Pharmacy  
WM.N.Gimmack Chemist